

# MINORITIES IN FINLAND

## GENERAL INFORMATIONS: FINLAND



Total population amount	5,219,732 (est. 2003)
Official languages	Finnish, Swedish
Minorities	Swedes (5,6%), Roma (0,2%), Saami (0,03%), Russian, Jews, Tatars
Migrants	Estonia, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Iraqi, Iranians, Chinese and others (2%)

## **GENERAL INFORMATIONS: SWEDES IN FINLAND**

### **SWEDES IN FINLAND - LOCATION AND INHABITANTS:**

The Swedes in Finland live in limited areas along the coast. On the south coast in the Uusimaa/Nyland province with the capital Helsinki/Helsingfors, and in the archipelago west of Turku/Åbo.

The other area is Ostrobothnia, Pohjanmaa/Österbotten, situated on the west coast around the city of Vaasa/Vasa.

The third area is the Åland islands with a population of 27.000.

There are 290.000 Swedes in Finland consisting 5,6 % of the population.

The majority of Swedish-speaking Finns live in bilingual municipalities, to a great extent dominated by the Finnish language. There are monolingual Swedish municipalities in Ostrobothnia and in the south-western region around Turku. All municipalities on Åland are monolingual in Swedish.

### **HISTORY:**

The Swedish-speaking population in Finland is mainly descended from peasants and fishermen who settled on the western and southern coasts and islands some time between 1000 and 1250 A.D. Finland belonged to Sweden until 1809, when it became part of the Russian empire as an autonomous Grand Duchy. In the 1917 turmoil following the collapse of the Russian Empire, Finland declared itself independent.

After being a part of Sweden for 650 years, Swedish remained the language of administration throughout the first half of the 19th century. It was not until 1863 that Finnish was recognised as an official language in Finland. For some time, Russian was also used, and the administration was in fact multilingual. After independence, Finnish very soon became the dominant language.

Under Swedish rule, many ethnic Finns changed their language and started speaking Swedish, but most of them reverted to Finnish in the late 1800s. Some families even have a Finnish-speaking and a Swedish-speaking branch. Today, the Swedish speaking population of Finland amounts to 5.6 % (290,000 people) of the total population of five million. Numerically, the Swedish speakers are a minority, but legally they are not.

#### **SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE ÅLAND ISLANDS:**

Soon after Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917, Swedish-speaking people of the Åland Islands required joining Sweden. The Council of the League of Nations settled the dispute between Sweden and newly independent Finland in 1921 by confirming the sovereignty of Finland over Åland in exchange for a high degree of cultural and political autonomy for the Islands.

When the League of Nations made its decision one of the priority issues was to safeguard the status of Swedish in the province. All Åland authorities work in Swedish, which is also the language of education on Åland.

The Åland Islands are a self-governing province within Finland. The Åland Islands have the right to enact their own laws and to have their own provincial administration, which provides many central government services. The most important of these are education and culture, health care, social issues, municipal administration, postal services, radio and television, and local business and industry. The Åland Islands' right to self-government is laid down in the Finnish Constitution.

#### **SWEDES IN FINLAND - THE CURRENT SOCIAL SITUATION:**

The social situation of the Swedes does not in any significant way differ from that of the Finns that live in the same areas. The Constitution declares that Finnish and Swedish are the national languages of the Republic of Finland. Although both languages are accorded the same status, this is perhaps more of a moral and political principle than a law for immediate application. The Constitution also stipulates that the cultural and social needs of the two language groups shall be met by the State on equal grounds. This is the basis for providing all citizens with the same services

#### **EDUCATION:**

For Swedish speakers and for many bilingual families, the natural choice is to put their children in Swedish day-care. Swedish-speaking schools are the foundation for the Swedish language and culture in Finland. The central education authorities have a Swedish department on a par with the Finnish ones. Education is an important element and a unifying factor in the Swedish network. There are over 300 Swedish comprehensive schools for children between the ages of 7 and 15. There are also secondary schools, vocational institutes and adult education institutions that offer teaching in Swedish. University level education is also provided Swedish.

Academic degrees may be taken in Swedish at Åbo Akademi University, located in Turku, Vaasa and Jakobstad, at the Swedish School of Economics and Business

Administration in Helsinki and Vaasa and the Swedish School of Social Work and Local Administration, which is a unit of the University of Helsinki. The University of Helsinki, the Helsinki University of Technology and the Theatre Academy of Finland offer both Finnish and Swedish education.

#### **CULTURE:**

The Finnish Swedish culture is a mixture of Finnish and Swedish culture. Some Swedish speaking Finns are more familiar with the Finnish culture while others are more familiar with the Swedish culture from Sweden.

#### **MEDIA:**

The number of daily newspapers for the Swedish minority is probably higher in Swedish-speaking Finland than for any other language minority in the world. There are nine Swedish dailies. Two of them are published on Åland. Hufvudstadsbladet in Helsinki is the largest with a circulation of over 50.000. Vasabladet in Vaasa is the leading newspaper in Ostrobothnia with a circulation of 25.000. The number of small specialised magazines lies around 150.

The Finnish Broadcasting Company maintains two Swedish channels, renamed Radio Vega and Radio Extrem, the former broadcasting national and regional programming and the latter aiming at a young audience. Television broadcasts from Sweden, or a selection of them, are available in most parts of the Swedish-speaking Finland. Television broadcasts in Swedish, by Finlands Svenska Television (FST), cover about one tenth of the total programming time. There are also local cable television companies producing Swedish programmes. Since August 2001 there has been a Swedish digital channel in Finland, also broadcast by FST.

#### **SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE SAMI PEOPLE:**

Sami are the indigenous population of Finland that as well dwells in neighbouring Norway, Sweden and Russia's Kola peninsula. There are approximately 6500 members of this minority group in Finland. 4000 of the Finnish Sami still live in their native area, known as the Sami homeland (Sámiid ruovttuguovlu), situated in the Province of Lapland.

#### **LINKS ABOUT SWEDES AND SAMI PEOPLE IN FINLAND ON THE INTERNET:**

<http://www.folktinget.fi/pdf/publikationer/SwedishInF.pdf>  
<http://www.folktinget.fi/en/index.html>